

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 SR-02

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5439

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CINCPAC

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UNCLAS SAIGON 5116

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MILI, PINT, VS

SUBJ: NVA/VC TREATMENT OF PEOPLE IN RECENTLY CAPTURED AREAS

DEPT PASS TO IBS/NCA AND NSC

REF: STATE 5018

1. FOLLOWING INFORMATION WAS GATHERED IN CONVERSATION WITH A SAIGON POLICEMAN (CAPTAIN) WHO HAS BEEN SEARCHING OUT ESCAPED FROM BAN ME THUOT TO FIND INFORMATION ABOUT PART OF HIS FAMILY, PRESUMED CAPTURED THERE. HE RELATES THE FOLLOWING EVENTS AS HE HEARD THEM FROM A BUDDHIST MONK, WHO WITNESSED THEM.

2. THE MONKS IN A BAN ME THUOT PAGODA WERE ACCUSED OF HELPING PEOPLE HIDE FROM THE "PRG"(THEY HAD IN FACT SHELTERED AND FED A NUMBER OF ESCAPEES) AND WERE LED TO THE MARKETPLACE IN BAN ME THUOT, THE DAY AFTER THE FIGHTING STOPPED. SEVERAL THOUSAND OTHER PEOPLE WERE ALSO ASSEMBLED THERE. ALL WERE TOLD TO SIT DOWN. THEN LOCAL "PRG" CADRE WALKED THROUGH THE CROWD, POINTING OUT GVN EMPLOYEES AND POLICE KNOWN TO THEM. ABOUT 300, ACCORDING TO THE MONK, WERE SELECTED AND TAKEN OFF TO ONE SIDE. THE PRESIDING CADRE DELIVERED A LENGTHY HARANGUE, ACCUSING THEM OF BEING AMERICAN LACKEYS AND SPIES, AND ENEMIES
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OF THE PEOPLE. THEY WERE ALL SHOT AND KILLED.

3. NEXT, FAMILIES OF THESE MEN KNOWN TO THE LOCAL CADRES WERE ORDERED TO FOLLOW SEVERAL ARMED GUARDS. THEY WERE LED OUT OF

TOWN, AND AFTER A SHORT DISTANCE THE MONK (WHO HAD BEEN RE-LEASED AND WAS FOLLOWING THEM OUT ALONG THE ROAD TO HIS PAGODA) HEARD AND SAW EXPLOSIONS (PROBABLY MORTARS) IN THE MIDST OF THE PEOPLE. SOME WERE KILLED, OTHERS WOUNDED. THEY PANICKED AND RAN INTO THE WOODS ON BOTH SIDES, AND THE MONK FOLLOWED SUIT. HE DECIDED TO KEEP GOING AND, IN THE COMPANY OF SOME OTHERS, EVENTUALLY GOT TO THE COAST AND BY BOAT TO SAIGON. WHILE WAITING FOR A BOAT, HE FOUND PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN NEAR THE FRONT OF THE COLUMN OF DEPENDENTS AND WHO TOLD HIM THAT, AFTER THE SHELLING THEY SAW VC SOLDIERS SLIGHTLY AHEAD AND TO BOTH SIDES OF THE COLUMN. AS THE FAMILIES RAN, THEY WERE SHOT AT, CHASED AFTER AND SHOT AT AGAIN.

4. APPARENTLY, THE "PRG" WANTED TO KILL THESE FAMILIES, NOT IN EXECUTIONS IN FRONT OF EVERYONE AT THE MARKET BUT AS A SUBTLER ACT OF TERROR TO FRIGHTEN OTHERS: MEN WOULD BE PERSUADED THAT ANY ANTI-"PRG" SENTIMENTS WOULD ENDANGER THEIR FAMILIES AS WELL AS THEMSELVES. SINCE THE MORTAR FIRE BEGAN A LITTLE EARLY, SOME OF THE FAMILIES MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE AMBUSH. THERE IS NO ACCURATE ESTIMATE AS TO HOW MANY WERE KILLED. MANY OF THOSE NOT KILLED AND TERRIFIED OF STAYING IN BAN ME THUOT ANY LONGER MAY HAVE EVENTUALLY DIED SOMEWHERE ALONG THE FOODLESS TWO-WEEK TREK TO THE LOWLANDS.
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